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Church, Samuel Harden

The perils of the republic

[Pittsburgh]

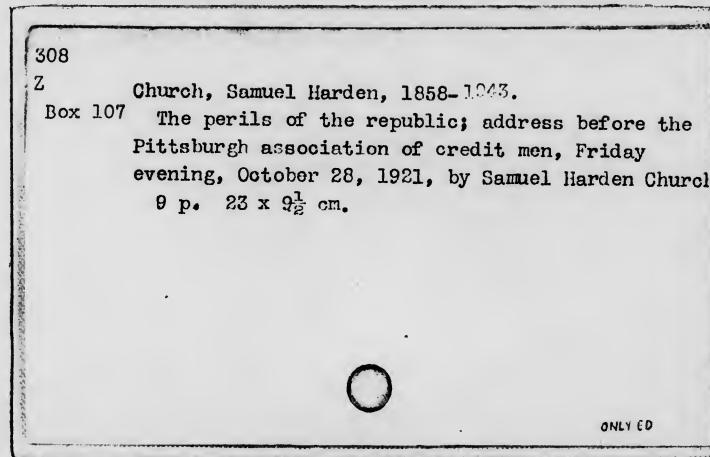
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ADDRESS BEFORE THE
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CREDIT MEN

Friday Evening, October 28, 1921
BY
SAMUEL HARDEN CHURCH

28 May 1922
C. H. C.

The Perils of The Republic



WHEN Oliver Cromwell returned to London after his last great battle at Worcester, where he had finally crushed the power of the British kings to dictate the political opinions and the religious faith of the people, John Milton saluted him with that sonnet which begins, "Cromwell, our chief of men", and warns him that "new foes arise," and then calls him to further public service with the inspiration of that famous line, "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war." After our own great war, we are apt to think that all strife is ended, and yet all around us we see that new foes arise, and that in order to overcome them we must be moved by the same persistent purpose and the same indomitable courage that sustained us when the shells were bursting in the actual conflict.

There are some perils of the Republic which lie directly in our path and call for our imperative action if we would preserve the precious heritage of liberty which we have received from our fathers. It has long been a conviction of mine that America has been given a two-fold mission to play in this world. It was her first task, taking the cry from the ancient scriptures, and stamping it on the resounding metal of the Liberty Bell, to proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. Her second task, when she found the world in flames from old hatreds and old bigotries, was to rescue civilization from destruction, and to proclaim liberty, not this time through the land only, but throughout the whole world unto all the inhabitants thereof. Her participation in the war was her first step in this world service and she has now followed this up by calling the great conference for the limitation of armaments.

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There are some persons who are striving to establish socialism as a form of government in this country. Yet, if they would look upon Russia, they would see their dream of socialism developed into its final nightmare, for Bolshevism is nothing more and nothing less than socialism carried to its complete development through murder and confiscation, to be followed inevitably by the paralysis of industry and agriculture, and then universal beggary, with a final chapter of famine, pestilence and myriad death. Such is the perfected system of socialism which its implacable promoters, Lenin and Trotsky, are demonstrating to the world, and at the same time that they demonstrate it, they acknowledge it to be a tragic failure, and yet maintain it at a cost which staggers humanity. But still there are people in America—some of them on platforms, some of them in parlors, some of them on soapboxes—who cry out for socialism in this country. They can learn nothing from the past or the present. I wonder if these people know that the first experiment in government that was made in this country was a socialistic government? They have only to read Governor Bradford's history of the Mayflower voyage and of the first settlement at Plymouth, to learn that the original plan of the Pilgrims was socialism, pure and simple. The first government in America, in 1620, was a form of soviet or Bolshevik government, without the cruelty and rapacity of the Russian form, but based on the same idea that all should share alike in the product, and that individualism should be swallowed up in the activity of the mass. And at the end of the first year it was found that men would not work when they were grouped in mass ownership, and that even the earth would not yield her grain and fruits to the dead energies of communism. Famine stalked gaunt and naked through a land that was

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rich in potential harvests. More than one-half of the Mayflower people died in the first year of the experiment, and then the whole plan of socialism, communism, sovietism and Bolshevism was swept aside, abolished and destroyed, never again, let us hope, to have an abiding place in any form whatsoever on any part of the American continent. These radical proposals come to us now mostly from our adopted citizens—those generally who are ignorant of our traditions and who know nothing of our spirit of liberty. When our foreign friends come to America to find a larger and a freer life for themselves and their children, we are ready to give them a cordial greeting—let me use that grand old Bible word—we are ready to receive them in the spirit of lovingkindness—and to make them welcome to the best that we have. We give them freedom in business, freedom in political life, freedom in religion, and equality before the law. But we want them to accept our institutions as they are. We are satisfied with the country as it is, and we ask them to be satisfied with it. If they are not satisfied with it, there are great steamers white and gold leaving our ports every week that will convey them to any country in the world which they think is better than this one. (Applause.) But we don't want them to come here with any intention of changing our form of government, or of adopting dangerous experiments, which might have been plausible in their European environment, but which the wisdom of our ancestors has long since shown to be worthless in this land.

Another peril ahead of us is the demand that a bonus shall be paid to four million men for their service in the war. Most of the men now seated before me at this table were in the war. I had two sons in that indomitable army, one of whom is still in France not yet recovered from his disabilities received

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in the trenches—and in their names, and I hope in your names also, I want to appeal to the conscience of the American Legion against this unjustified and unpardonable raid on the pockets of the people of the United States. (Applause.) From the time of Julius Caesar it has been customary for the army to come home from its victories and demand extortive sums of money from the people, and the people have always feared such an army. A precedent like that should have no place in our Republic. The debt that we owe to our soldiers is not a debt that can be paid with money. Our young men did not go to war for money. They went to war to save civilization, and they did save it at a great sacrifice on the part of our entire nation. We all had a share in the war, its sufferings and its victories, whether we went to the front or stayed on this side. Those who fell on the field of honor have won eternal glory. Their families should receive appropriate pensions. Those who were wounded or stricken with disease should be cared for in the fullest measure of lovingkindness. But the rest have enjoyed the proud obligation of duty, they have won the high honor of a mighty victory, and they possess the imperishable gratitude of their country. But money and gratitude cannot go together. The men whom I am speaking for—and I am speaking the minds of thousands of soldiers who were in the foreign service—say that the matter should rest there. (Applause.) If the American Legion presses this mercenary demand against the people of this country they will by that act transform their splendid and patriotic organization into a Pretorian Guard, and our people will fear it and resist it as a dangerous and autocratic power, when they should otherwise love it as the guardian of our flag. (Great applause.)

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Another peril of the Republic is the bigotry of Henry Ford. In his suit for libel against the Chicago Tribune, Mr. Ford stated his impression that Benedict Arnold wrote Matthew Arnold's essays, and declared that all history is bunk. Thus intellectually equipped for literary and philosophical service to his country, he inaugurated a weekly magazine, "The Dearborn Independent," and is devoting the whole power of his wealth to a persistent, bigoted, mendacious and malignant attack upon our citizens of Jewish faith. For example, he is now endeavoring to prove that Benedict Arnold's treason was caused by the Jews because there was a Jew on Arnold's staff. Truly, in this case, history as Henry Ford knows it, is bunk. (Laughter.) It is precisely the same method of reasoning that was used by another unworthy paper, long since suppressed in the interest of the decent freedom of the press, which averred that Lincoln's assassination was brought about by the Catholics because one of the conspirators was a Catholic. As both these crimes were committed by Protestants, would it not be much more logical to say that the Protestants are as a body responsible for them? Not content with publishing these odious and transparent falsehoods in his newspaper, Mr. Ford is reprinting them in book form and selling them at cost to any of the feeble-minded who will buy them. The Bible says that the man who diggeth a pit for his brother shall himself fall therein, and the wave of opprobrium and contempt with which Mr. Ford is trying to stigmatize the Jews and make them hateful to the American people will, beyond peradventure, unless he recedes from his unworthy undertaking, roll back upon him to his own confusion.

There are still other perils in this procession of things that give us pause. Not long ago

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I sat down to dinner beside one of the greatest and most respected Judges in the United States, and I asked him what he thought of the prohibition amendment. He replied that regardless of what anyone's opinion on the liquor question might be, he thought it was a great mistake to put the prohibitory statute itself into the constitution; that the amendment should have been drawn so as to confer upon Congress the right to legislate either as to the control or as to the prohibition of the liquor traffic, and the desire of the nation on that subject would thus be met from time to time. But my distinguished friend also said, that to put the prohibitory statute itself in the constitution, whence the large majority of the people could never get it out as long as a small minority wanted it kept in, was an unheard of thing which could not fail to provoke a vexatious spirit among large sections of our population. It is unfortunate that the amendment was adopted during the deep and passionate emotions of the war. Four millions of our best men were necessarily away from the polls. Other millions refrained from voting at such a time. In the meantime the nation had kept steadily marching toward a true temperance. Wine had almost completely disappeared from private tables and had indeed been wholly banished from our public banquets. The workmen on the railroads and in the industries had learned that sobriety was the indispensable essential to regular employment. Decent men with any mark of social or family pride would abhor to go into a saloon. Local option was fast putting the saloon itself out of existence. Then came this prohibition amendment, and with it came a palpable demonstration of the one cardinal fact of Christianity, as emphasized in the teaching of Jesus, and that is, that you cannot make a man good—you cannot make a nation good—by an act of Parlia-

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ment. (Applause.) It is only by direct action upon the immortal spirit of man that you can reach perfection of life. Laws never did and never will control conduct. The peril that comes from an unpopular constitutional prohibition is a wave of drunkenness in circles where it never existed before, particularly among young men and young women, and a tendency to avoid the law which is rapidly weakening, if it does not eventually destroy, the moral fibre of the nation. (Great applause.)

There is a grave peril in too much law. Some men think that everything can be accomplished by an act of the legislature. But wise men know better, and in the constitutions of most of our states wise men have secured the insertion of a regulation that the legislature shall not meet oftener than once in two years. It is true in our country and in every country that thinking men are filled with anxious fears when a legislature composed in some part of men who are not learned either in the law or in the affairs of business assemble for the purpose of enacting laws. Montaigne said, "I am of the opinion that it would be better for us to have no laws at all than to have them in so prodigious number as we have." Emerson said, "It is better that we should have fewer laws and less confided power." William Ellery Channing, a great New Englander, said, "The less government the better, if society is to be kept in peace and prosperity." And Austin Phelps said, "Through the whole range of authority he governs best who governs least." Yet every year we witness the enactment of an avalanche of laws designed to correct every evil, real or imagined, that seems to exist, and the action of many of those laws immediately hampers business and impedes the progress of the country. In the choice of her public servants democracy is entitled

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to the best talent at her command. There is no more dangerous maxim than that one man is as good as another for all causes. Mediocrity can easily compass the destruction of the whole edifice.

Greatest of all perils that threaten the welfare of our country is the steady amalgamation of one labor organization after another into one big union. The American Federation of Labor has very nearly approximated itself to the control of all the union labor in this country. The American people do not like things that are too big. Our people have always restrained business when it would grow too big. They would not permit the railroads in the Northwest to consolidate. They brought suit against the Steel Corporation, only to have its consolidation approved and vindicated by our highest court. They dissolved the Harvester group and the Standard Oil group. And now they are face to face with the Big Brotherhoods and the American Federation of Labor. The peril is a very serious one, because in the competition of nations material success comes to that country which possesses the freest labor. America and England could never win this material success under union labor in competition with France and Germany under the open shop. As the speed of a fleet is governed by the speed of its slowest unit so the production of a union plant is controlled by the capacity of its least efficient workman. Three evils must come always in the track of the labor union—the closed shop, the limitation of production, and the sympathetic strike. It seems that we have just at this moment escaped a railroad strike, the threat of which has disturbed the peace of the nation for many weeks and which was intended to bring starvation, sickness and death to thousands of our people. What should be the public attitude on such an

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enterprise? Let me put the illustration in a new form. Let us suppose that the Presidents of all the railroads in America were to serve notice at one time on the American people that the rates for transportation service are too small and that unless those rates are increased within 48 hours not a wheel will turn on any railroad in the United States. These Presidents have the power to do that. They would simply have to issue an order to the train dispatchers that at the end of that period no train shall move. The stoppage would be absolute. The very life of the nation would be within their grasp. Do you think the nation would tolerate such conduct on the part of the railway executives? No government in any country or in any age has ever been able to perpetuate itself when it has tolerated within its dominions a force that is stronger than itself. What we will not allow to capital, what we will not allow to business, we should not allow to labor. Experience has clearly shown that when each road acts within its own territory as between the management and the men it is easily possible to attain an equitable and satisfactory adjustment of every problem affecting the welfare and happiness of the whole force. The railroad is the artery of national life, and no threat must ever again be made that that artery shall be severed by a strike. (Great applause.)

These are some of the perils that lie around us as we go forward in the development of our national destiny. They must be met with wisdom and courage. It is indeed true that, "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war," and we should strive to reach these victories of peace through the exercise of all those moral and spiritual forces which dwell in the eternal heart of man and make him righteous in his purposes, because it is, after all, righteousness that exalteth a nation. (Great applause and cheering.)

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